

April 17, 1968

Professor Arne Tiselius  
Biokemiska Institutionen  
Uppsala, Sweden

Dear Professor Tiselius:

I was most gratified to receive your letter of April 2 referring to your plans for a general symposium tentatively scheduled for September 1969.

I am indeed happy to take note of this new program of activity for the Nobel Foundation. As you know, I firmly believe that the Foundation could play an important role of world leadership in bringing science to bear on the solution of the most urgent human problems.

I will be giving very serious thought to the questions you raise, and will myself respond with any ideas that I may be able to come up with.

My main criticism at the very beginning of the tentative program is that it already may be too broad. It might be better to select just two of the five topics and devote the entire time to a deeper exposition of them. ~~May~~I make the following suggestions that intersect several of the categories in the tentative listing.

(1) What areas of scientific knowledge remain unused, although they might contribute in an important way to the progress of mankind? Do we understand the reasons for the long lag? Can we suggest procedures for shortening the lag on both a national and international basis?

(2) Can we outline scientific-technical solutions, or contributions to solutions, of major world problems? What kind of new knowledge could contribute to world peace, the alleviation of hunger, the economic and social development of the backward countries, world problems of population and disease, etc.?

(3) How is science now programmed with respect to its meeting human needs? (Even when it is not explicitly programmed, the collective decision-making of areas for scientific pursuit is certainly not a purely random process.) Is it desirable or possible to formulate more efficient means than now exist to achieve solutions to problems whose general importance is already widely condeded?

TISELIUS

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(4) It is obvious that the progress of medicine has already wrought important changes in "human nature" and that further biological research and technology will open up many more options in the future. Should the eventual design of human nature be a subject of explicit planning, and if so, what is the most appropriate process for democratic decision on such vital, pervasive questions?

I take the liberty of sending, under separate cover, some of my recent writings that deal more generally with these subjects. Perhaps I might have the favor of hearing your initial reaction to the suggestions before pursuing more specific details, like suggested participants, etc. I would, however, press upon you the names of Peter Medawar and Francis Crick as two of my own friends and colleagues who have given very thoughtful consideration to a similar set of problems.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

Sent separately: Testimony before Senate Subcommittee on Government Research, 1968.

P.S. Let me also add the name of Harvey Brooks, who is doing an excellent job as chairman of the National Academy of Sciences committee on public policy. Have you read Daniel Greenberg's recent book: "The Politics of Pure Science"?